

Diligence is considered to be one of the most important mental factors we need to cultivate in order to be able to engage in meaningful practice, for without joy and enthusiasm we cannot effectively listen, contemplate, and meditate on the Dharma. If we have to force ourselves to do something and do it reluctantly, we are not able to do it well. However, when we experience joy and enthusiasm, we do not feel discouraged even when encountering problems and difficulties, but are able to persevere and accomplish our goal.

Hence diligence provides us with the energy and determination to prevail; it helps us to cultivate new good qualities, and to increase the good qualities we already possess.

Thus, diligence does not merely refer to making an effort and working hard, but to joyful or enthusiastic effort that delights in virtuous activities.

A mental factor that delights in non-virtuous activities, on the other hand, is an aspect of laziness. It is one of the main obstacles to spiritual practice and will be explained later.

## **2. The method for engaging in the practice of diligence (i.e. how to begin the practice of diligence)**

The method for engaging in the practice of diligence is to cultivate an understanding of Buddhist philosophy and in that way of Buddhist practice. We need to comprehend the nature of practice, its benefits and its goal, for only when we clearly see the advantage of doing something and the disadvantage of not doing it, are we able to develop sufficient determination and enthusiastic effort. We should again and again ask ourselves why it is important to practice? How does it benefit us? What is the advantage of being diligent? What is the disadvantage of being lazy, of not practicing?

One of the advantages of diligence is that we obtain anything that is important and valuable.

The Buddha says in the ***Exhortation to Wholehearted Resolve*** (*Adhyasaya-samcodana-sutra*):

*Always rely upon noble diligence,  
Which is the remover of all suffering and darkness,  
Which is the basis of freedom from miserable realms,  
And which is praised by the Buddhas.*

*One who is diligent has no difficulty  
Accomplishing any project, whether mundane  
Or supramundane. Through the power of diligence,  
What wise person gets disheartened?*

*Those who set out for a Buddha's enlightenment  
Perceive the faults of sloth and sleepiness,  
And then continually apply diligence.  
So I have entreated them.*

Also, Maitreya says in his ***Ornament for the Mahayana Sutra*** (*Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*):

*If you have diligence you cannot be defeated by wealth.  
If you have diligence you cannot be defeated by afflictions.  
If you have diligence you cannot be defeated by discouragement.  
If you have diligence you cannot be defeated by attainments.*

The first line refers to practitioners of smallest spiritual scope who due to being diligent are not overcome by the objects of happiness of this life, such as wealth, reputation, fame, and so forth. Even though there is nothing wrong with wealth itself, desire and craving for money and other riches can totally control a person's life. Those who lack affluence may not be able to engage in spiritual practice because they are preoccupied with the pursuit of material wealth. Those who are affluent may not be able to practice because they are too absorbed in enjoying their possessions.

The second line refers to practitioners of middling spiritual scope who strive to overcome cyclic existence. Due to their diligence they are not overpowered and defeated by their afflictions, such as anger, attachment, etc. but instead are able to reduce and eventually completely eliminate these afflictions.

Regarding the third line, it requires even more diligence when engaging in the practices of a Bodhisattva. One of the main obstacles for Bodhisattvas to pursue the path to enlightenment is discouragement. Such discouragement may arise because it takes so much time and effort to overcome the cognitive obstructions, because sentient beings are limitless, and because, due to sentient beings' afflictions, it can be extremely difficult to work for their benefit.

The last line describes the importance of diligence for practitioners who have progressed on the path and have obtained spiritual attainments and realizations. However, without diligence they are in danger of becoming complacent and conceited, or of simply giving up their practice and enjoying their accomplishment.

Therefore, diligence is explained to be important in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of spiritual practice.

Furthermore, Aryasura says in his ***Compendium of the Perfections (Paramita-Samasa)***:

*If you have great diligence, free from discouragement  
There is nothing you cannot attain and accomplish*

Also:

*Even all non-human beings delight in helping you  
You attain all types of meditative absorptions.  
  
And spend all periods of the day and night fruitfully.  
Your collection of good qualities does not decline,  
And your purposes surpassing the affairs of humankind  
Flourish like the utpala flower.*

Regarding the faults of not having diligence, the Buddha says in the ***Questions of Sagaramati Sutra (Sagaramati-pariprccha-sutra)***:

*The enlightenment of the lazy is exceedingly far off and distant. The lazy lack [qualities]  
from generosity to wisdom. The lazy do not work for others' welfare.*

Diligence is a quality that enables us to accomplish any goal – worldly or otherwise. Laziness, on the other hand, wastes our precious human existence. It prevents us from cultivating good qualities and from working for others' welfare, and thereby takes us further away from enlightenment.

Furthermore, the Buddha states in the ***Mindfulness of Excellent Teaching (Sad-sharmanusmrti-upasthana)***:

*Whoever has laziness –  
The single basis of the afflictions –  
Whoever feels some laziness  
Lacks all good qualities.*

Since for ordinary beings it is much easier to generate afflictions than virtuous mental states, it is also much easier to engage in negative actions than in positive actions. Hence laziness is the basis of our afflictions and of their resulting actions of body, speech, and mind. With laziness our anger, attachment, jealousy, and so forth, can manifest unhindered and produce countless different future problems and difficulties.

Therefore, if we do not cultivate diligence, i.e. delight in performing virtuous actions, we will never be able to overcome suffering.

### **3. The categories of diligence**

This has two subtopics:

- i. The actual categories
- ii. The method for cultivating diligence

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